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SUBJECT: IS TURKEY CONSIDERING A NEW PATH ON IRAQ POLICY?

Classified By: POL/C Janice G. Weiner for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) We met Jan. 23 with the new GOT Deputy Special Envoy for Iraq, Murat Ozcelik. Ozcelik (please protect), who had been slated to become the MFA's spokesman but at the last minute moved into this position, told us that FonMin Gul had asked him to pursue some new policy directions on Iraq within the Turkish bureaucracy, including the military. Among the alternatives would be a new approach to the Iraqi Kurds. Turkey is increasingly worried, Ozcelik asserted, that if Iraq disintegrates, Iran will "basically take over the whole country, including the north." The GOT may have its concerns about an independent Kurdistan and the PKK and Kirkuk issues, said Ozcelik, but it is more important for Turkey's interests to restrain Tehran's ambitions. Thus he is floating within the Turkish interagency active and friendly engagement with the KRG, primarily aimed at ensuring that the Iraqi Kurds look to Turkey and not to Iran as a benefactor and protector.

12. (C) Cautioning that we were speaking without instructions, we commented that this would be a significant policy development that we would welcome. We reminded Ozcelik that we have been urging the GOT for some time to reach out to the KRG leadership. The Iraqi Kurds rely on Turkey economically, and we would naturally prefer they have this kind of interdependence with Turkey, not Iran. Turkey would be a natural gateway for Iraqi petroleum products to reach European markets as well. If Turkey could move beyond its concerns on the PKK and Kirkuk and make moves like reaching agreement on additional border gates, this would improve not only Turkey-KRG ties but Turkey-Iraq relations overall (not to mention the positive effect on our own relationship). Ozcelik asked that, should Turkey take this new initiative, we urge the KRG leadership to reciprocate.

13. (C) Comment: This seems like a promising development, but it is not yet clear how much authority Ozcelik has to pursue this initiative (though he claimed to have Gul's support). He noted, for example, that his boss, Oguz Celikkol, was not planning to discuss this idea during his visit to Washington this week. Early in his career, Ozcelik was a young adviser to former President Ozal, and worked in the private sector before rejoining the Turkish foreign service a few years ago. Ozcelik said he was astonished at the parched discussion at

senior interagency meetings on Iraq, and said he was working to make the interagency process on the issue a more meaningful exercise.

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